

Dave Bing

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Dave Bing

Dave Bing is a fiddler and fiddle maker from Melissa, West Virginia, outside of Huntington. He now lives in Harmony in Roane County, West Virginia with his wife. As a young man, he spent time learning from many elder fiddlers in West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky, including the Hammons Family of Pocahontas County. Dave Bing has been a member of numerous old-time bands such as The Bing Brothers with his brothers Tim Bing and Mike Bing, Gandydancer with Gerry Milnes, and The High Ridge Ramblers with Mark Payne and Andrew Dunlap.

EH: Emily Hilliard

DB: Dave Bing

00:00

DB: (Small talk) Instruments and... stereo and it said [unintelligible] on it and I thought, well!

EH: Oh yeah.

DB: And you know, you gotta dub right on top and you can't set the tracks and adjust and all that.

EH: Oh yeah, right. Okay, let's see. (adjusts recorder) Okay—that looks about right. Okay, so why don't you introduce yourself and tell me where you are right now.

DB: Dave Bing, we're in, right now, we're in Roane County, just out of Harmony. Harmony was a city or a town, little village about 4 miles from here, and they just took the post office about 10 years ago. They still let us keep Harmony, West Virginia 'cause it sounds so cool, but it's actually Gandyville, West Virginia.

EH: That's a good name for a musician place.

DB: Yeah.

EH: Yeah, I was wondering if we were in Jackson or Roane.

DB: Right on the line.

EH: Okay. Why don't you tell me about your upbringing, where you grew up, what your parents did.

DB: I grew up outside of Huntington, West Virginia about a mile and a half in an area called Melissa. My, both my mother and my father's from Wayne County, West Virginia—very rural. They said, one said the other lived across the hills. One was in Beach Fork area of Wayne County, my father's from East Lynn area of Wayne County and very rural upbringing, no electricity all the way through high school, and my... by the time we came along and started, you know, all of our lives visited our grandparents and there was a very, like an ancient kind of feel, just like going into another world. They'd just gotten electricity and were excited about that, but they still you know, did the farming to get by. My grandfather died when I was 8 years old, of Black Lung, had a little mine that he worked in. So anyway, my dad worked in the press in the Huntington newspaper, my mom raised us 'til we were in our teens and went back and got her education, her college education and became a teacher and retired from that.

EH: Alright, and how many siblings do you have?

DB: Older brother Mike is 3 and a half years older than me, younger brother Tim 2 and a half years younger than me—I'm one of those middle childs. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Did your family play music?

DB: my mother played music—her and her brother and sister. My dad's side of the family kind of gave up the music—not their love of it, but kinda gave up their music a generation back. All my great uncles tinkered—none of them was really great fiddlers or banjo players but they all tinkered with music and loved it.

EH: What did your mom play?

DB: Guitar, guitar. Actually her dad played banjo, which I didn't find out until later. He came to visit and there was a banjo there and he picked it up and started playing "Cripple Creek" and my jaw dropped and well, back up a little bit—my grandmother, my mom's mom passed away in childbirth when my mom was 5 years old. My grandfather started another family with another—with a 2nd wife and we didn't get to see them very much, so it wasn't like—2 or 3 times a year—they lived down in Logan outside Logan in a little town called Man in Logan County, so, but yeah, they all had a big tie to music.

EH: And was your mom playing old-time or parlor guitar picking or...

DB: Uh, it would be the Carter Family kinda thing.

EH: Okay.

DB: The first thing I learned from her was Wildwood Flower and there was a tune called Fireball Mail, so was kind of a Carter Family, bluegrass-influenced music.

EH: nice. So how did you get into it (I'm gonna move a little bit closer.)

DB: Um, well there was always a guitar around and I think mom bought me my first guitar when I was 5 years old, played in the Christmas play—chorded Silent Night while the whole class played/sang Silent Night—that was my big debut (laughs). But getting into old-time, one of the first tunes I learned was, like I say, Fireball Mail, Wildwood Flower, that sort of thing. Uh... but first I ever got into old-time was when I was about 15 there was a gathering at my grandfather and his brother's—that was 7 brothers altogether. They used to when they were young men in their 20s would get together for a weekend and have local people come and would spend a whole weekend playing music and carrying on, so to speak, and my dad and his brother decided to kinda revive this gathering—they called it—and start calling it a chicken roast, well they got some of the local pickers, and it was a banjo player called BooBoo Raimey, there was a guitar player called Amp Spence, and all these people I'd never met before and I'd never been around clawhammer banjo and I saw that and it just blew me away. And that's when I first—when I was 15—when I first started playing.

EH: And were your brothers doing the same thing about that time?

DB: No, they were about 2 or 3 years later when I was 17, 18, is when they got into picking.

EH: And then did you get a banjo or did you find a teacher?

DB: Well my uncle had an old Sears Roebuck, I think Silvertone banjo and I had my dad talked me out to BooBoo Raimey—lived out on his side of the hills in East Lynn, and spent time with him and he wanted me to play bluegrass- he got me started with bluegrass style and finally I talked him into playing

clawhammer and never, never went back to—which I wish I would have—but never learned to play the bluegrass style.

EH: (laughs) okay. But he—he knew both.

DB: yeah, which was really common—the early people I learned from banjo-wise would just slip off the picks if it was an old-time fiddle tune, put ‘em back on if they was gonna sing one...

EH: Got it. But he was more inclined to play bluegrass than you were?

DB: I think so. It was a new thing and... well, I saw new thing—this had been '72, '73 so not...

EH: yeah, I mean you still see that kind of feeling about it.

DB: Yeah.

EH: in certain communities.

DB: Yeah.

EH: Then did you... what was your first band?

DB: My brothers and I. We started playing when they started showing an interest—not to take credit now, but I did get them started on the instruments, and then of course they just took off with ‘em but we drove my mom crazy learning... what was the tune... John Henry!

EH: Uh-huh.

DB: And said, I wish to hell you'd pat your foot with the rhythm of the song you're playing. We were upstairs, driving everybody crazy learning John Henry, but we just kept learning fiddle tunes and a few singing tunes and finally—there was a gang of folks our age in Huntington that were getting together and we found out about it and we started getting together with them and just kept flowering out from that and finding other people that played. And then the first time we were asked to play somewhere was... oh God, where was it...down (snaps) oh... there's one of those great pauses you were talking about... oh well...Don West Farm!

EH: Oh yeah!

DB: He had a festival down there, like '73 or so.

EH: Okay, yeah.

DB: And we went and they said, you gotta go there and they asked us to get on stage—we were just going to check this out, and they asked us to get on stage and they heard us play and wanted us to get on stage and... very, very nervous—make my hands sweat right now thinking about it! (laughs)

EH: (laughs) yeah, I've seen some of those posters—I think John Henry Days or whatever the John Henry Festival—it had like Pete Seeger at some point and some country star...

DB: yeah, we didn't get to see any of Pete Seeger or any of those—I remember, well Hot Mud Family was there one year, that's like when they were in their prime rolling with it... uh, well Dave Morris, but it was more local West Virginians, pretty straight old-time back then.

EH: Okay, cool.

DB: Yeah.

9:41

EH: Did you have teachers in those early days at all?

DB: I had—I found fiddlers that I'd go visit. There was a local... well around Huntington, there was a lot of—there was the radio stations out of Huntington—a lot of 'em played and then of course when I came along the music had kinda waned quite a bit from it's prime. And they were really excited that somebody my age was into what they were doing, and I had played guitar and I was able to buy a couple fiddles by then, but there was oh, 4 fiddlers I could think of that used to play radio that I got to spend time with and learn from them. But it wasn't like "oh put your finger here," that kinda thing—more just me recording them, watching them, then going home and listening to recordings and trying to figure stuff out.

EH: Yeah. And then maybe talk a little bit about subsequent bands and how this kind of evolved.

DB: That I played with?

EH: Yeah, yeah.

DB: Yeah. Well I played with my brothers until '97 and then doing a duet thing or doing workshops—Gerry Milnes and I did quite a few workshops and traveled here and there while I was playing with my brothers and then we needed some elbow room from each other, once again, so to speak.

EH: (laughs)

DB: And Gerry and I started Gandydancer then, and that was a whole lot of fun. That was the first group that did a lot of research and tried to focus on total West Virginia music and had a whole lot of fun with that and it went on for quite a few years. And the whole time I had been doing workshops, teaching at Augusta and then getting to go overseas with Dwight Diller and different folks and so Dwight and I started doing acts, and so some of the folks that were in my workshop—can't think of any names right now, but I would do little side things other than you know, it wasn't the band and nothing else. And then Gandydancer dissolved, and just here the last 3 years or so have been playing with Mark Payne and Andrew Dunlap—the High Ridge Ramblers. And having a lot of fun with that because we're totally focused on West Virginia music and not doing any dividing lines—we'll go from bluegrass right into old-time, right into gospel, right into ballads, but trying to keep it all you know, West Virginia and surrounding areas. I'm from Huntington so Kentucky bleeds in there quite a bit. I had a big influence—matter of fact when I first started playing, more influence from Kentucky than I did West Virginia. Just more fiddlers right there across the weather.

EH: Yeah, was Eastern Kentucky—those fiddlers—was that more accessible at that time?

DB: Uh, yeah—I don't know. More accessible is kinda—with the internet everywhere is accessible, you know, and you can look things up.

EH: Right.

DB: In a previous interview, I was asked about the difference from back then and now the different revival modes, and it seems, after I thought about it more, back then without the internet, without the access to things, it was a more of a mysterious, more underground kinda feel or something, where now you push that button and BAM you've got everybody's—how much they weigh and what color are their eyes and where they've been playing and everything where back then you really had to look it—search it out. So yeah, there was more fiddlers from 2 generations back or so still around, but the access now to their recordings and everything is so easier to find—you know what I'm saying? Than—yeah.

EH: yeah, like the John Salyers and... oh...

DB: Oh yeah,

EH: I'm blanking.

DB: Oh there's so many. Buddy Thomas was a big one that I got to, well I met friends of his, but I never got to play with him, but there's Buddy Thomas, there's George Hawkins, the list goes on.

EH: So during this time were you doing music full-time or this was a side gig?

DB: Oh when I first started, yeah. Definitely just piece of mind and was doing construction work. And I was, right when I was 19 is when I found out the Hammons Family played music. I knew them all my life but never knew they played music. And when I met them the work thing becomes to support my music habit more or less. And back then construction work was more easy to find—I was a pretty good carpenter. I could work for 6 or 8 months and then take off 2 or 3 months and go spend it on the Williams River around the Hammons Family. But no, it never was really full-time as far as... it still isn't.

EH: Yeah. So how did you know the Hammons Family?

DB: Uh, my grandfather and my dad would go fishing—that's where the trout fishing is in West Virginia—the better trout fishing, around where the Hammons Family lived. And our first vacation was when I was like 3 years old and we went to spend time on the Williams River which was—so my dad could trout fish more than anything else, but from that time on, Sherman Hammons would come and visit us and as far as music goes, he might sing a ballad or something like that about the area, but banjo music or nothing like that never came up. He was just this neat old guy that was local and had all these good stories and—about anything came up and he'd have a good story about it and very witty. But went up—my dad, after we'd been playing a couple years—stopped by to buy night crawlers and saw a banjo head sticking out of the bed, and was “is that a banjo?” and Sherman: “why, yeah!” and anyway, one thing led to another and I went up by myself one time, and first time I had ever heard that ancient archaic feel on the fiddle and I was pretty much quite everything and dove into that for a couple years.

EH: (laughs) So was it just Sherman or was Maggie around?

DB: I met Maggie and Burl later. Sherman, yeah I'd never met the other members of the family until after I started playing music with Sherman.

EH: And today it's mostly Trevor who is the only one who's really playing?

DB: Trevor Hammons?

EH: Yeah.

DB: Yeah, yeah, out of the Hammons Family, I would say that's probably it. Yeah. On another side, you listen to recordings of (dog Buddy makes sound)

EH: (laughs)

DB: ... High Ridge Ramblers, he's right in the middle of us, you'll hear the dog sneeze or the dog scratch if you listen real close to the DVD. You'll hear the dog sneeze or the dog scratch if you listen real close to the DVD, er, CD.

EH: Aw. That's how you know it's real.

DB: But yeah, Trevor, of course that would be 3 generations down, but Sherman had a grandson Lee, and I don't know if he ever—he worked so hard he didn't have much time to play music, but they used to sing quite a bit. They would come down and harmonize with each other and sing songs like Knoxville Girl, that kinda thing.

EH: Cool.

DB: But I never really seen him with an instrument or anything. But Lee had a granddaughter too and I don't know what happened to her--That was playing banjo and doing really well with it. Lee Hammons.

EH: Okay.

DB: yeah.

EH: Maybe she doesn't live around any more to come play.

DB: yeah, she would probably be around 20 now.

EH: Okay. Was that about the time that Dwight was recording—Dwight and Alan Jabbour was recording them?

DB: That would have been about 3 years before we came along. '72, '73 right in there is when I started spending a lot of time with Sherman. And they were like '69, '70, and '68, '69, 70, that era.

EH: Okay. When you think about the West Virginia style of fiddling, how would you characterize that?

DB: Phew. Many facets. There's so many different styles, 'cause you got the Ohio River influence, Kentucky, Ohio-influence where I grew up and then Central West Virginia's got its own style, um, people usually seem to think of modal tunes when you mention West Virginia, and it is... it's not only unique to West Virginia—there are other areas that have modal tunes. But there is quite a few, like more modal

tunes in West Virginia music. And then Hammons Family music has this really strong Scottish and Irish influence in theirs. I've been getting to teach in England and Spain, and there's a big following of Appalachian music, and West Virginia music, and when I play some of the Hammons stuff, they say god, that's just direct. Some of the accents I'm doing are just pure Scottish stuff, so...

EH: That's cool. And then how do you think West Virginia music positions in the greater revival. I mean there's a lot of Round Peak, North Carolina homogeneity, but where does West Virginia fit in?

DB: most of the people who play it seem to ... oh man, I'd like to ponder that for a while before I answer it.

EH: We can come back if you want.

DB: There's a—I think of Tommy Jarrell and folks and the way they play it and most of 'em seem to toe the line the way Tommy played it and everything. The Hammons Family, and West Virginia music, there are those folks that still play it just like Melvin Wine, just like Ernie Carpenter, and a lot of... if I'm doing a workshop, I try my best to but I, I've always—I never got into music for preservation, so to speak, I got into it for peace of mind, having fun with it. And I'll take those tunes and other influences slip in. You can still feel the flavor of the tunes and I think a lot of West Virginia musicians do that. And it's evolved, which is a natural evolving of the tune, I think. I always go back to—I spent time with Sherman mainly, but I got to spend time with Burl and I heard recordings of Uncle Edden, well they all played the same tune. Sherman called it Star of Bethlehem, Burl called it Wild Man of the Woods, Uncle Edden called it... Queen of the Earth, Child of the Stars. And that's just in one family and they all had different versions of it.

21:42

EH: yeah.

DB: So all of that evolving in just one family. So they all—and I think that's a big West Virginia thing is to take a tune and make it your own instead of keeping it like you say, homogenized, like “this a recording, this is the way it should be.”

EH: Right, yeah. I was talking about this with someone and we were kind of wondering why so many fiddlers and banjo players in West Virginia are from like the Calhoun, Braxton, um, you know, that area—Gilmer. And I was saying that I think it's where a lot of collectors paid attention to and there were probably others all over that didn't get recorded, but I wondered if you had thoughts on that.

DB: I think it's true. First, what I was gonna say was the music was more important to them but not necessarily. That was a very rural area and entertainment-wise, I think it may have been more important—that was their entertainment—where along the high river where I was from they had a lot of influence of radio and all the different types of music and it kinda fizzled. It's hard finding someone around Cabell County that plays an old style like the central West Virginia styles, and I think it was just more outside influences then that changed. And most of the collectors were into something new that hadn't been heard and wanted to get that on before it dies kinda thing, or before it fades away.

EH: And Patrick Gainer was from that area and focused on those, knew those people.

DB: Yeah, yeah. Right.

EH: Why don't you talk about getting into building fiddles.

DB: Well like I said I used to do carpenter work and I've always been—wood has always been a main interest of mine. My dad grew up very rural West Virginia, knew the woods better than anyone I've ever run into. Could just glance at a tree and tell you what it was and I don't know if he was ever wrong. Anyway, I always had this appreciation and love of wood. I got into—I had a friend in high school that his dad built houses and started just for extra money, my 1st job was when I was 15, was working with him during the summer. And then just kinda kept doing that. And after years of construction work I went into remodeling, got married, started a cabinet shop, ended up making furniture, so what I'm getting at—I always worked in wood. Got, when I got into violin, or playing fiddle I was always, “man you oughta make you one of those.” “Yeah!” (laughs) and I was always brought up, you know, the devil's instrument, the mystery, the mystique of fiddle. I was afraid to adjust the sound post by myself or anything and finally when Gerry talked me into it—man you need to take you an apprenticeship and build you a daggone fiddle, and talked me into doing it. I got with Reid Krack—one of the few West Virginia fiddle makers at the time—that would be the year 2000, and took an apprenticeship and we made a fiddle together and just... someone saw it and said, “God I gotta have one of those!” And I said, “You know how much time this took?” “I don't care!” And anyway, I made him one and it just kept snowballing and that's how I got into it and still people's wanting them—(corrects himself) people's wanting them—not “wantin'!” (laughs)

EH: (laughs) How long did that first one take?

DB: Oh, well I was still doing cabinet work then and it took like 2 years, 2 and a half years and that was just an hour here, a couple hours here and that kinda thing. And it took a while to get it totally completed. But I can do—When I'm cooking, when I'm really staying at it, I can do one—construction part in about a month and a half and then the finish about another month. I use the old-time style of finish and it takes a while to set up.

EH: What kind of woods do you use?

DB: Traditional—the maple for the body, the back and sides and then the top is spruce. And there's some really good West Virginia woods. There's a red maple and a red spruce that I've just started making them with West Virginia woods and making a really good fiddle.

EH: Cool! And where do you get those from?

DB: Well I cut one in Helvetia with a friend from Helvetia, Mark Howes. He has—I think it was his dad's property, and he told me about it, and for three years, “we gotta cut that tree, we gotta cut that tree.” Well we finally did—I still got some in the barn, but I made about a half a dozen fiddles out of it.

EH: Nice.

27:03

DB: And it was before my skill, or before I developed really good skills, and they're alright. This—you don't have to hammer on you?

EH: (laughs)

DB: This right here is from Helvetia wood.

EH: okay.

DB: but there's—that one was—I kept myself, dried it myself and did the whole deal. But I've got a friend that's now a wood supplier. He's retired and got into... he's always loved violin making and just the milling of the wood and everything and he's in Lewisburg. And he is starting to find some really good West Virginia wood—red spruce and red maple, and the last couple I've made have been out of that and they turned out well.

EH: What's his name?

DB: John Preston.

EH: Okay.

DB: Old world tone woods! Give him a call!

EH: (laughs)

DB: (laughs)

EH: Have you got into other instrument building?

DB: No, and I should. Everyone's been getting after me to. I got several projects in my garage there. I got a lot of old banjo pots that need necks and that kinda thing and for 20 years I've been meaning to do it. I'm really good at running off and playing music. (laughs)

EH: yeah. Seems like once you do a fiddle, though, the rest would be fairly easy?

DB: Well that's what even—this John Preston, he's made half a dozen fiddles, made 3 guitars, and a couple mandolins, and he says no, they're no comparison—the fiddle is a whole lot harder.

EH: yeah.

DB: I'm sure some guitar makers are gonna hear this and say well, (laughs) but I dunno, I've never tried it.

EH: But just the carving of the scroll seems—I mean that is kind of mind blowing to me how that's even done.

DB: I was very scared the first one—it's my favorite part now.

EH: That's really pretty (looks at scroll). So do you have a pattern for this?

DB: Yeah, there's a, there's guides, templates, everything. You trace it out and there's a method of cutting it out. But well, the more you do it the better you get.

EH: How many have you made?

DB: 52!

EH: Woah! One for every week of the year.

DB: (laughs) never looked at it that way! You look at—what you've been doing for 17 years, you shoulda made more than that! But like I said, I've been doing other things too.

EH: And when you talk about the traditional finish, what is that?

DB: An oil base, a linseed oil base, which they feel that's pretty well what Strad did and most of the Kremona makers. [?]. Maggini, most of them, they feel were there oil-based finish. And it takes UV rays to dry it. You know, it's nothing with heat or air. Well a little bit, but the main thing is UV rays. All these growing lights you see around, they're not to grow pot or for... (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

DB: They're for drying my finishes.

EH: So the one that's...right here on the table?

DB: That's the very first one I... with the Augusta Apprenticeship.

EH: okay.

DB: And I'm getting ready to refinish it because the finish didn't go to well and I was really—I was afraid of taking too much wood off, so I got the top loose and I'm gonna re-graduate it—thin the top a little bit and put it back together.

EH: okay. So you basically just put in—rub the oil in as much as the wood will absorb?

DB: You don't want it to absorb it. But you put a coating of different, you know, different techniques, I've tried a couple. And then go back to the—there's a product called liquin that I put on that seals the pores of the wood, and then you put the oil... yeah, if it absorbs into the wood it's sometimes it never dries. And yeah, you don't want it soaking into the wood.

EH: Got it. Do you feel like you are part of an instrument builder community?

DB: In a sense. I've got a lot of friends—we drive other friends crazy when we get to talking fiddle making. Well, John Preston and I were up at—he played bass with us Friday night when we played the square dance and afterwards we got into talking fiddle making and it's almost like you gotta be careful because certain people, I won't say any names, “God, are you all talking fiddle making?”

EH: Like Mark Payne?

DB: (laughs)

EH: (laughs) He's a grumpy guy!

DB: Well, yeah. (laughs) You are gonna cut this, right?

EH: Yeah. (laughs)

DB: He's our token grumpy band member.

EH: I'll just cut it and send him—send him this part on repeat. (laughs)

DB: (laughs) Oh god, you better not.

32:06

EH: So who are other instrument makers in West Virginia who you talk to?

DB: Well there's a lot of instrument repair persons that do it. Oh, I can't remember his name! There's another guy in Lewisburg who's a very proper trained violin maker. Palo? Paulo. Paulo.

EH: Yeah, I met him.

DB: And, well John Preston makes. Jesse Milnes has turned into a good violin and bow re-hairer.

EH: Oh, nice.

DB: And Nate Drunkenmiller. All these people around the Elkins area. But yeah- a lot of the young people are getting into it and a lot of 'em are taking proper apprenticeships. You know, it used to be 4 or 5 years, you start sweeping the floors and doing that sort of thing. Yeah, and there's a lot of workshops these days you can take and so much information on the internet.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah. Yeah, I took my bow to the Fret 'n' Fiddle, and I moved here after Joe Dobbs died—just after. And they said—they were like, well you could buy a new bow but there's nobody here who knows how to re-hair it anymore. (laughs)

DB: (laughs)

EH: I was like—I'm not gonna buy a new bow!

DB: Uh-huh.

EH: But that was pretty disappointing. And I asked who in the area could do it and they were like, we don't know.

DB: Have you gotten it re-haired?

EH: No—I need to.

DB: Oh man! Well Jesse, Jesse's good.

EH: Yeah, I need to take it to Jesse. But yeah, that was kinda sad that didn't get passed on.

DB: yeah. Yeah.

EH: Could you talk a little bit about the role festivals have played—maybe the revival—when you found it and then the second wave.

DB: Um. Buddy (yells at dog). Don't want that in the background.

EH: (Commenting on dog) Those eyes!

DB: Well the first Don West Festival was the first one and that was the first time I ever seen people getting on stage and having a performance they're playing in old-time music, that was strange because it was always just sitting around and playing a fiddle tune and gabbing and I'd never seen it performed before. Well a couple different ones I got to go to—there was one little festival called the Huntersville Festival which turned into a pretty big thing—there were people coming from all over the United States and that was just outside of Marlinton, West Virginia. And that was—got to meet a lot of people there. Memorable. But probably the biggest influence is when I went to Glenville in '77 there were literally 80-100 fiddle players in that L of the motel there, in the parking lot of the Conrad motel, and they were jamming 10 at a time and I'd never seen that. And I was just—what's going on here! And had a cheap—well I had a Marantz superscope back then and I recorded—I still got those recordings somewhere I think, but it was Gangs... Pete... what's his name—Pete Vigor—he was part of it. But like I said they came from all over and all these tunes that were not West Virginia tunes I hadn't heard—it was some of my first exposure to that. And it was another—not quite the same as meeting the Hammons or finding out the played music, but it was still another big turning point of you know, getting ahold of people, “hey, I gotta—I gotta do this with ya.”

EH: Right.

DB: That was a big turning point.

EH: Yeah, I wonder—now that you mention it, if there is part of the change is because people feel like they can find it on the internet so they're not really seeking out the face to face interactions as much? There isn't like the urgency-- I gotta record you, I gotta learn what you're playing.

DB: I totally agree with that. I think the last, well when I first started doing workshops was in '85, '86 and everybody came to these things—to Augusta and everything. And there—which they still get people to come, but it just seems like the level, the level of musicianship isn't as good as... you had better pickers wanting to learn about music back then 'til now they're finding out on the internet. And you can just about tell the ones that have learned on a—on the internet or YouTube or whatever and it has a different feel than the folks who have shared the music with one, with each other. Well, one thing it's lacking is that evolvment we were talking about later. You know, where you're doing your own thing with the music. It'll be exactly like the recording you heard of so and so doing it back in the 40s or so.

EH: Yeah, right. I mean, that's never interested me. I mean I can appreciate it, but...

DB: That's it, I do too. I'm glad for people that preserve it and keep it true to the old form but I don't want to play the fiddle tune the same way for 40 years, you know, it's gonna get boring to me. Different things with the tune.

EH: Yeah, for me it's never really been about the technical aspect I mean I understand that's part of it, but it's more just sitting down and playing and enjoy playing.

DB: Yeah, yeah.

EH: Then what do you think is going on now with festival s in the state like Clifftop, Glenville, Vandalia—what do you see happening?

DB: Well with all the budget cuts coming up and everything leering you know, over everybody's shoulder, it's kinda scary to see what's gonna happen. But, Glenville, you know, got really cut bad and they're taking it upon themselves to do fundraisers and it's almost to the point of self-sustaining. They do square dances, people donating money just to keep it going. It'd going on 70 years of continual—it's like, I've heard somewhere it's the longest continuous state folk festival. Don't know if that's true or not, but I'm not much for researching. But just hopefully if Vandalia, if they got all the big cuts or Clifftop got all the big cuts, they will have people that will donate to help those kind of things out.

EH: Yeah, I'm worried about it. And then maybe before that what did you see happening with I don't know, the 2nd revival, you know, now that you're considered an elder.

DB: yeah. You know, Becky asked me that and all I can say was, well the first one was groovy and the second one was groovier. (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

DB: 'Cause I never felt I was reviving, you know, I—folks that I met at my dad's get together were, well yeah, they were the next generation, but it just kinda was passed right on and I didn't feel like—"oh god, it's gonna fade away I gotta bring it back in!" Never felt that. And now, I guess it's your definition of revival. It's a popular, it's a popular alternative music maybe so to speak now and people, just from, you know, what's the pop music—there's nothing there for them, they turn to this. And there was a little bit of that back in the day too.

EH: Right, yeah.

DB: I dunno, cause I never—just the statement, you are a revivalist, the revival going on, I never really can get my head around that because I never really felt like I was participating in a revival. Yeah.

EH: And like for you, it wasn't really.

DB: I don't think.

EH: Yeah. I mean, that's how I feel about when people say vinyl records are for hipsters and I say, well I grew up listening to vinyl records. I just kept on having 'em, you know?

DB: Right, right. (laughs)

EH: But yeah, I can see what you mean about that. So do you... but do you think there are people like.... I know people like Jesse Milnes who grew up with it, they aren't part of a revival, they're just the next generation. So do you think that is persisting?

DB: yeah, yeah, I do. There's a lot of young fantastic pickers. There was a period, my age group, I'm 62 now, and it seemed like there was—you don't find many pickers between my age and say 40. There is some, but and then there was a big influx from that time, that younger area. Or the younger age group. But—hell I forgot what your question was. (laughs)

EH: Just if there is...

DB: If it's continuing...

EH: yeah, to be like an unbreaking evolution.

DB: I think so.

EH: If we're not gonna call it a revival.

DB: (laughs) Yeah, yeah. The ongoing evolution of it. I know Allegheny echoes Is going on right now and they're getting good response among the West Virginia people coming. And yes it is the kind of a setting of you know like Augusta, but a still, it's West Virginia people seeing this thing as held all by West Virginia people, we're gonna bring all these—they have a really good kid turnout for that I think.

EH: I gotta go down there and check it out some time.

DB: Yeah.

EH: Were you involved in the starting of that?

DB: Yeah.

EH: Could you talk a little about that?

DB: Yeah... no. Better not. Better not.

EH: (laughs) Okay. Well instead of the founding, do you wanna talk about what it is, and how many people you get and who the teachers are—things like that?

DB: Yeah. Well, I' will say my brother had the idea to start it and wanted it focused on just totally West Virginia... well Augusta there for a period got totally away from West Virginia—I think I was the only West Virginia teacher there one year in all the summer, October, and everything, other than like Gerry Milnes, of course. But I think he got, my brother got to put it... got frustrated with you know, nobody focusing on nothing but West Virginia music and the West Virginia instructors so to speak, so he started it with that in mind, that he was gonna focus on that. And he has kept it pretty true, you know there's time's he'll have to go outta state to get, cause he will cover bluegrass and old-time, it's mainly old-time, but he has Jimmy Costa is fairly regular, Robin Kessinger, Andrew Dunlap, I used to when it first started, teach up there, Bobby Taylor, so most of the main, David O'Dell—the known West Virginia folks who have taught different workshops. Ben Townsend's taught there a year or two, and so... yeah.

EH: Yeah, I mean—I was glad to find out that existed cause sort of when I took the job, I was thinking about the experiences I had coming to West Virginia you know as an outsider and I would always feel like at Clifftop you would just arrive at this place and you don't really know much about the place around

it and you're just plopped down in the woods and you play music and some of it's from West Virginia and some of it's not and you're playing with people from all over and some of it felt like, well I could be anywhere right now—I could be in Canada in the woods and playing music and I really wanted that sense of place that I felt was kinda missing, and I still think about how that could be brought back in Clifftop, but I dunno.

DB: Well Clifftop has never been about that.

EH: Really?

DB: About West Virginia music. Yeah. It's always been, we're just gonna have a big contest of you know, any kinda music. I've judged, as a matter of fact, I'm judging there this year, and it's always been, don't judge if it's West Virginia music—whatever type of music old-time vein that they're in, judge it how well they do that. It doesn't matter if you don't score extra points if it's a West Virginia tune or not, and that's always... and in a way I like that but in a way as far as reviving or revivaling West Virginia music or a festival about West Virginia music, no it's not at all.

EH: Yeah. But then Glenville kinda is that place where you can go and be with West Virginians and learn from West Virginians, so...

DB: Yeah. God it was great this year, it was one of the best for a while.

EH: yeah, I wish I could have stayed for a little longer, I was just there Saturday.

DB: Want to take a break for a minute?

EH: Yeah, yeah.

DB: I need to get rid of some coffee and get some more. You want a...

47:03

END OF TAPE